

consider in what respect the seed may be compared with alms, in the hope that they “who have in their heart disposed to ascend by steps” may be more encouraged to divide freely with the poor. The grain that is sown is very small, and yet produces such a number of grains as to seem almost incredible; thus it is with alms, a small thing, a poor thing as being a human act; but when properly sown, produces, not money, nor food, nor clothes, but an eternal kingdom; just as if the grain of wheat that we sow should produce an ear of gold instead of an ear of wheat, studded with precious stones instead of grains of wheat. Then, the grain put into the ground must corrupt and die or else it will not sprout, as our Lord has it in the Gospel, “unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, itself remaineth alone;” thus alms must be freely bestowed as a right, and not as a loan, and to those only who cannot return it; and it must be given to corrupt and perish, that is, without slightest hope of getting it back in this world; for when thus lost and corrupted, it will not fail to shoot out again, and produce much fruit in life everlasting. Again, the grain put into the ground needs both sun and rain to germinate; and so with alms, which, as well as all other good works, needs the sun of divine grace, and the showers of the blood of the Mediator; that is, in order to become meritorious, they must spring from the grace of God, that has its source in the blood of Christ; for then a matter of the greatest insignificance becomes one of the greatest value, by reason of the stamp impressed upon it by grace, and thus merits, not only as a favor, but as a right, the grace of life everlasting. There is this difference between the sowing of the seed and the distribution of alms, that many things may occur to the former that may prevent the reaping in gladness, though they may have sowed in tears; because the seed may not sprout for want of rain, or it may be cut down, after sprouting, by slugs and worms; or, even after ripening, it may be stolen or burned. But alms, when given with a proper intention, is always safe; for it is stored up in heaven, where neither moths, nor flies, nor thieves can come near it. They, then, who sow such spiritual seed in tears, will unquestionably reap fruit in great joy.

END OF PSALM 125

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 125

The people of God rejoice at their delivery from captivity.

1. When the Lord brought back the captivity of Sion, we became like men comforted.
2. Then was our mouth filled with gladness; and our tongue with joy. Then shall they say among the Gentiles; The Lord hath done great things for them.
3. The Lord hath done great things for us: we are become joyful.
4. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as a stream in the south.
5. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
6. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds.
7. But coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 125

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Sion, we became like men comforted." When we first heard of the decree of our emancipation, and of our return to our country, we could, through joy, hardly believe it; and we were like those who, when the great affliction and trouble, get some comforting news, becoming, all at once blithe and merry, from being grave and sad. And this selfsame unspeakable consolation is always felt by those who are seriously converted to God, and, despising the hopes of this world, and abandoning all desire for the goods of this world, "direct their steps in the path of peace." They know the value of being rescued from the captivity of the devil, from the depths of the pit, and the being prepared for the enjoyment of true liberty and everlasting peace, through the call and the guidance of the Almighty. Interior joy will not fail to show itself externally, which it does by the expression of joy on the countenance and gladness on the tongue. "Then," when we got the good news of our delivery, "was our mouth filled with gladness," our face appeared blithe and merry, and "our tongue, with joy," burst out into expressions of joy and gladness. "Then shall they say among the Gentiles." The news of said emancipation not only gladdened the hearts of the emancipated, but it even astonished the Gentiles when they heard it, and they could not help exclaiming, "the Lord hath done great things for them;" the Lord has behaved most magnificently to his people; for though it was Cyrus that liberated the Jews after so long a captivity, we can easily understand that he was prompted thereto by God, for he did it at the very time Jeremias prophesied it would be done, after seventy years; and Cyrus himself avowed that he got his power and command from heaven, and that he got an order from heaven to let the people go, and to build the temple in Jerusalem; and, finally, it could not be expected that any king would let so many thousand captives go free without the smallest ransom, and not only so dismiss them, but load them with presents on their departure, had he not felt himself constrained thereto from above. The Gentiles, then, could not help attributing the whole to divine interposition.

2. "Then was our mouth filled with gladness; and our tongue with joy. Then shall they say among the Gentiles: the Lord hath done great things for them."

3. "The Lord hath done great things for us: we have become joyful." The emancipated, quite pleased with the Gentiles' notions on the matter being only in accordance with the facts, thus reply. It is the fact that the Lord dealt nobly with us, beyond our merits and our expectations when he brought us from a miserable captivity to this our sweetest native land; and thus "we are become joyful;" we who had hitherto been groaning in sorrow, captives as we were.

4. "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as a stream in the south." As all the captives did not come home together – for some came, in the first instance, with Esdras, and then another party with Nehemias – the first party, then, pray to God for the return of all the captives, and they take up the simile of a torrent that is wont to run with great force and violence in a

southerly gale; hence they say, "turn again, O Lord, our captivity." Bring back our captives, the majority of whom are still in the land of the stranger; and bring them back at once, as quickly "as a stream in the south;" for when the wind blows from the south, the rain falls, the streams and the rivers rise, and the great flood rolls rapidly on to the ocean, and that without delay or obstruction. If the exiles, on their return, prayed to God so earnestly, what amount of earnestness will not be required of us, still exiles as we are? For though some have gone home, have come to their country, yet many are still in exile, on the road, nay more, many are quite reconciled to the captivity, and have become so attached to the things of this world that they do not bestow even a thought on their country; it was, then, absolutely necessary that the Lord, with all the violence of a torrent, when the south wind blows, should force them and compel them to ascend. In conclusion, then, the former, as well as the latter, are, to a certain extent, captives; for "all expect that every creature shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption;" and even the blessed in heaven included. It is for this perfect liberty of the children of God, of which St. Paul treats in Romans 8, that we most properly pray when we say, "turn again our captivity as a stream in the south." The south means the south wind that usually preceded rain, and caused the streams and rivers to fill and run with rapidity; most expressive of the tide of captives returning back again in crowds and in haste to their beloved country.

5. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Having asked God to bring back all the captives to their country, he now addresses the captives themselves, and exhorts them not to be deterred by the labor of the journey, or to be detained by regard for any property they may have acquired in a foreign land, as they were sure to have much more and more valuable property in their own; and most happily compares them to the sower and the reaper; the one ordinarily does his work in grief and sorrow, being obliged to put his corn into the ground without having any certainty of ever getting the smallest return from it; and, therefore, seems to labor and to tire himself in order to lose what he has; but when the harvest comes, he reaps with great joy when he sees the corn that, to all appearance, was lost, is now, instead of being lost, returned to him with an enormous increase. This applies peculiarly to us, pilgrims as we are; for those who are content with their captivity, and are so engaged by the love of this world as never to think on their country, heaven; they look upon the road adopted by the just to be nothing better than a positive loss and an injury. While the true exiles make all the haste they can to their country above; they freely give to the poor, who will never return what is given; they labor, without fee or reward, in teaching their brethren, as did the apostles; they freely renounce all manner of pleasure; all of which seems the height of folly to those who know not what is to come of it, while, in reality, it is "sowing in tears," that they may afterwards, in due time, "reap in joy." And if they who are still so attached to their captivity, would seriously reflect on this, they certainly would change their mind, would begin to go up, and, no matter what it may cost them, they would sow the seed, that they may soon after reap it in joy in the kingdom of heaven.

6. "Going they went and wept, casting their seeds."

7. "But coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves." He now describes, at greater length, the process of sowing and reaping. "Going they went;" the laborers and farmers went from their house to the field; "and wept, casting their seeds;" had much pain and trouble while shaking the seed, from the uncertainty of their ever having any return. But, in harvest time, when coming home, "they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves;" bringing back whole arms full in return for a few grains. This so peculiarly applies to the virtue of almsgiving that it cannot but be of use to